

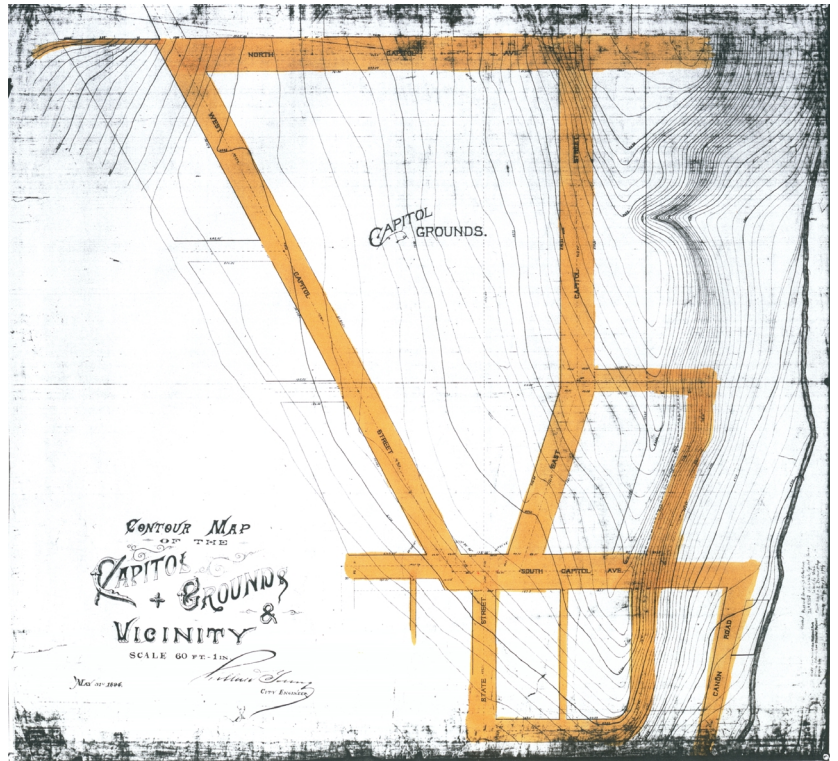
## C. SITE DESCRIPTION

### Capitol Hill

More than two decades before the capitol was designed and constructed, the site was set aside by the territorial government for use as its capitol grounds.

When landscape architect John Olmsted viewed capitol hill in 1911, he wrote in his notes that the grounds even that early on were fenced in and planted. It is largely by means of the journal of his brief visit and his drawings that we know how the site appeared before the capitol building was built.

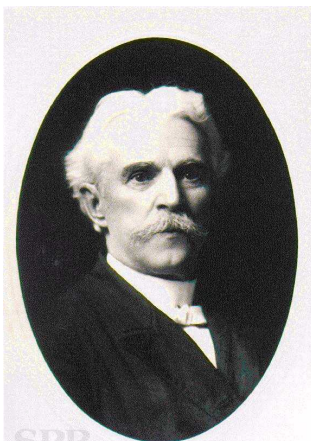
During the pioneer period, the site was known as "Arsenal Hill" because of the large adobe weapons and munitions storage building located there. The building disappeared entirely, however, during a devastating explosion in the spring of 1876, which killed four and broke many of the windows of buildings downtown.



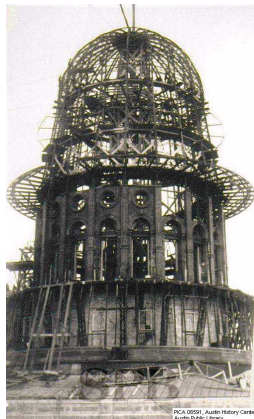
1894 TOPOGRAPHIC MAP

### Elijah E. Myers

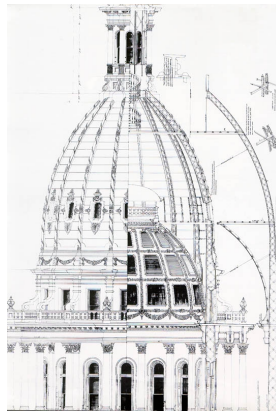
E. E. Myers, architect of the state capitols in Texas, Colorado and Michigan, prepared plans for an initially-conceived capitol in 1889-90. He won an architectural competition whose jury was advised by Harrison and Nichols, a local architectural firm, and the veteran architect William Ward, who had assisted with the design of the Salt Lake Temple nearly four decades earlier. Myer's drawings have not been located and it is not known if they are extant. H. W. Nichols was so impressed with the design that he wrote to the Capitol Commission in April of 1911 asking them to remember the 1889 competition, and suggesting that no improvements could be made to the design, excepting a better heating and cooling system, even after 22 years.



ELIJAH E. MYERS 1832-1909



TEXAS CAPITOL DOME: E.E. MYERS



MICHIGAN STATE CAPITOL:  
E.E. MYERS



COLORADO STATE CAPITOL: E.E. MYERS

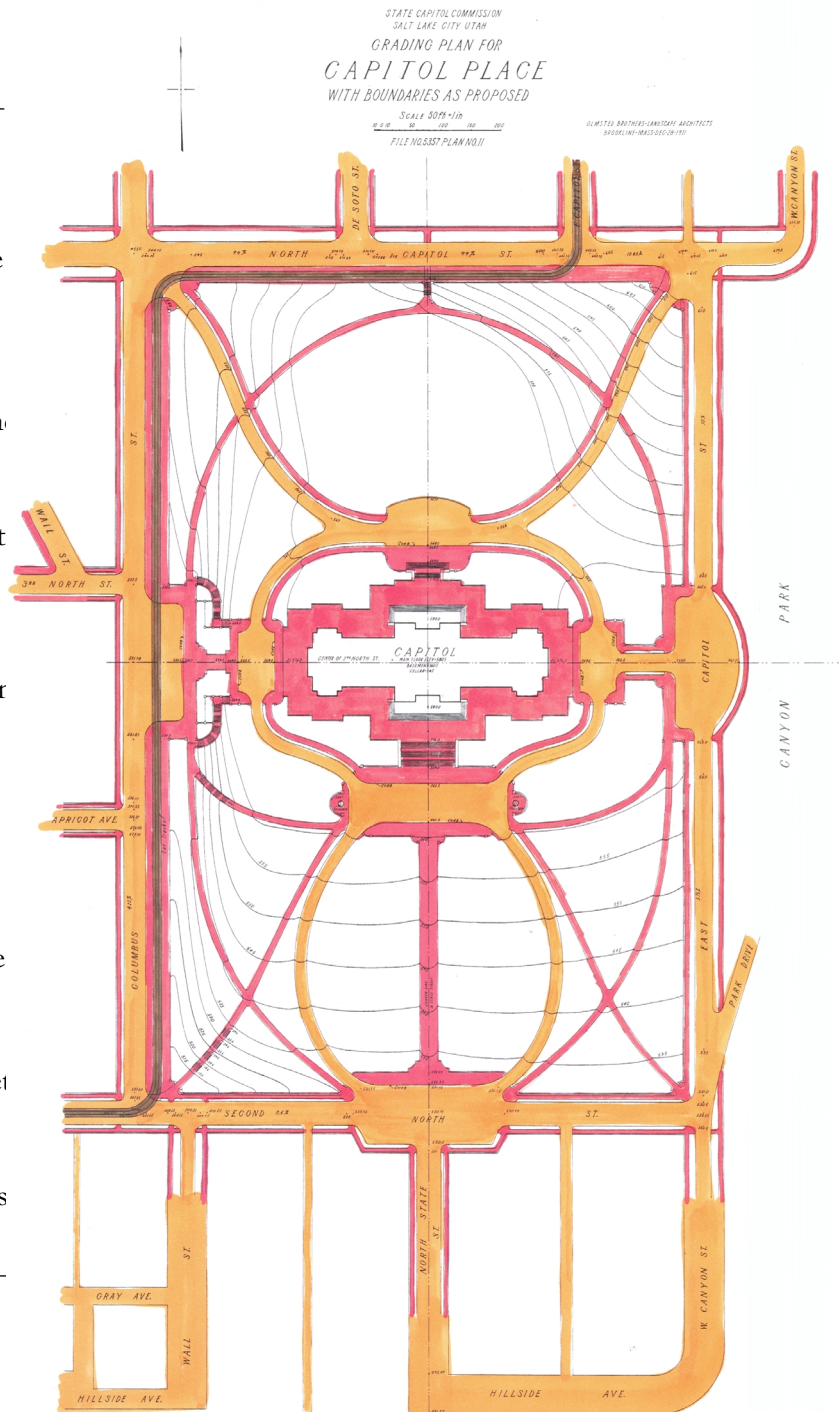
## John C. Olmsted

In October of 1911, when Olmsted visited to examine the site, he felt it was evident that the commission had already consulted an architect, (though none was mentioned at that time) and disagreed with opinions that the building should be placed towards the south (front) of the capitol property. He used for the preparation of his proposals a topographic map prepared in 1894 and a 1902 map, although there has been found in his archives a 1911 topographic map which he apparently did not use. Entrants in the capitol competition early the next year all mentioned Olmsted's plan in their proposals, and responded to his designs.

It should be noted that even at that early date, South Capitol Ave (then 200 North, now 300 North) and State Street had an unusual connection, being an intersection of five directions, with South Capitol widening south from the intersection toward the east. Though not indicated on the plan, at that time, light rail ascended State Street from downtown. Notice also that there was a one-block strip platted between East Capitol and the eastern edge of the hill, where the Canyon road was.

Olmsted's recommended solution to the problems of the site was to acquire that block to the east, as well as to extend the north-to-south-running Columbus Street further south to 200 (300) North, creating on all sides an orthogonal site. He then proposed a formal, Italian-style, axial, and symmetrical pedestrian circulation scheme with entrances to the site on the north, south, east, and west. The north (back) entrance was approachable on foot or vehicularly from the northwest and northeast corners. Carriages and automobiles could also access a designated loop around the building from the east entrance or from a circular loop originating and exiting at the 200 (300) N. State street intersection.

The grand pedestrian walk from State Street up to the building shows a rise of 30 feet and yet appears to be a ramp as opposed to a stairway. While the Capitol is shown to be on the uppermost portion of the site, the grounds have not been sculpted into a pyramidal platform. There is a built platform or raised pedestal with a plaza and balustrades which set off the building. The recommended topography shows sensitivity to the natural lay of the land and tames it for use without applying an unmer-



OLMSTED'S RECOMMENDED 1911 PLAN WITH BOUNDARIES AS PROPOSED

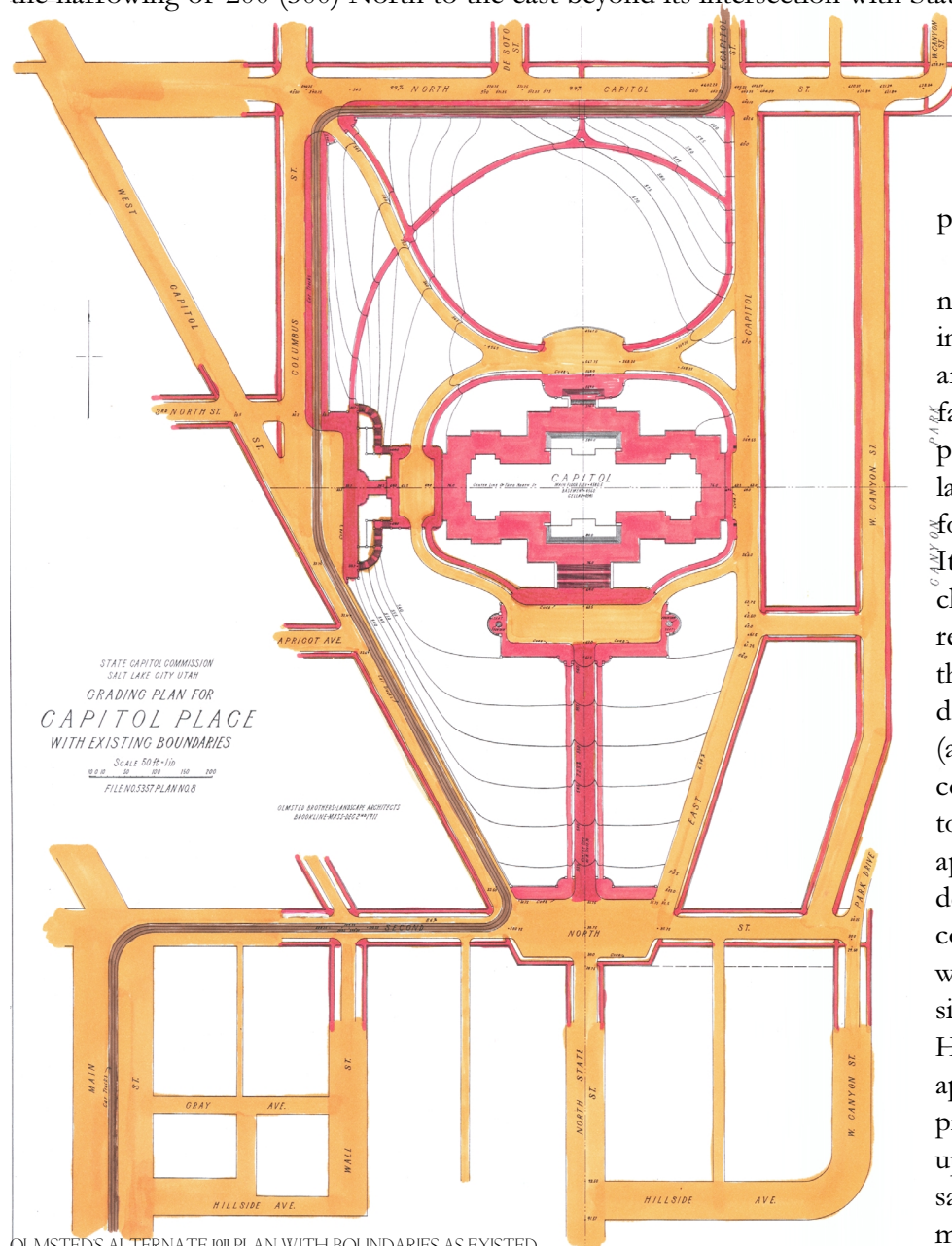
cifully geometric symmetry. As designed but not constructed, this built terrace would have provided a workable solution to the steep grade on the east side. A person exiting the building on the west would do so either at the ground level onto an upper plaza-- or at a lower level, passing below said upper plaza and out onto a lower plaza at street level.

Columbus Street on the western axis has been widened for a drop off/pick up point, and the light rail has a stop at the western entrance as well, before continuing south to Main street. Olmsted described the lower plaza entrance as for rail travelers: a subway entrance, using the building's elevators to ascend to the grade in a less grand, greatly practical manner. Staircases descend from the north and south of the upper plaza, connecting the two plaza levels and collecting the promenading walkways from the north and the south.

Olmsted's alternate plan (without any additional land) is very similar in all aspects where it could be, in terms of grading, the northwest corner entrance, the west upper and lower plazas, the grand pedestrian walk, and the narrowing of 200 (300) North to the east beyond its intersection with State Street. He argued heavily for the

acquisition of additional lands, and only prepared the alternate plan because it was required of him. The Capitol Commission eventually did decide to acquire the properties to the east as well as west.

While Olmsted's plans were never utilized verbatim, his insights into the particular issues of the site are invaluable. Even now, Olmsted's father, Frederick Law Olmsted is still perhaps America's best-known landscape architect, and John was a formidable designer in his own right. It is not evident why the commission chose not to follow Olmsted's recommendations. It is clear, though, that even after the commission's decision to move the building south (against his strenuous argument), he continued to write to them, desiring to fulfill his contract. This contract apparently consisted of preliminary designs prior to the competition, consultation with and advising of the winning architect, and more detailed site plans as well as planting plans. His letters indicate that he was not apprised of the development of the project, nor were any of his follow-up inquiries answered, other than to say his contract was complete as much as the commission intended.



OLMSTED'S ALTERNATE 1911 PLAN WITH BOUNDARIES AS EXISTED

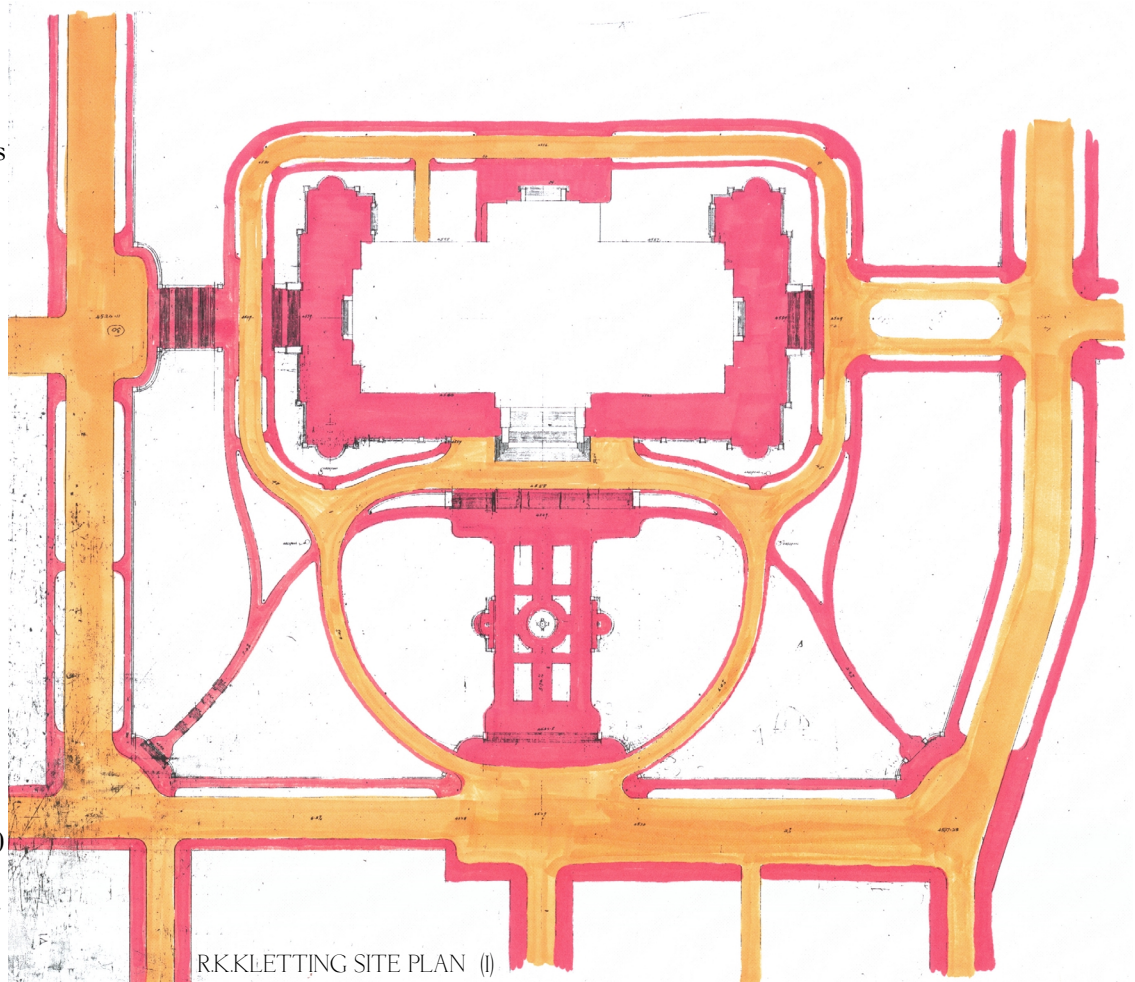


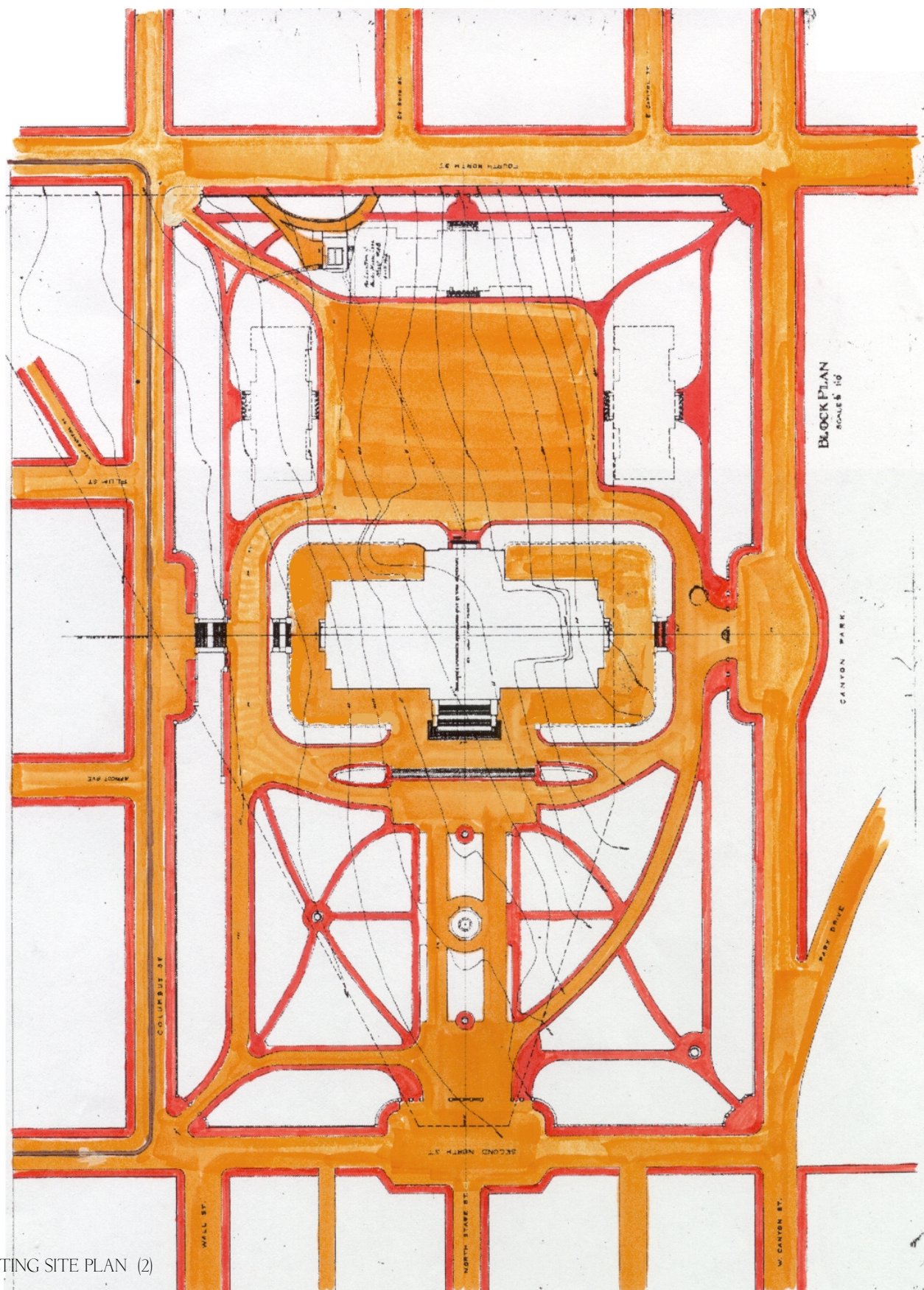
## Richard Karl August Kletting, Capitol Architect

After winning the Capitol competition, European-trained Richard Kletting developed a rough plan of the site, stylistically not unlike that of Olmsted's, though much more sculptural than landscaped-based, as architects are wont to do. The grand walkway became considerably grander, with fountains, planting, and more levels, as there were stairs indicated at the State Street entrance as well as at the base of the architectural platform that wrapped around the building on the south, east, and west sides. Stairs also ascended this platform on the east and west. Kletting retained a carriage entrance on the east and a drop off point on the west, though he eliminated the terrace and in its place put a wide stairway.

"Eliminated" may be inaccurate, however, because it is unclear whether Kletting was adapting Olmsted's plans, working with a memory of them, or designing from scratch. Kletting said he followed Olmsted's report and incorporated many of his suggestions (including the terrace, and carriage and trolley entrance on west side). But he explained that if the building were moved forward, it would reduce the foundation and wall cost. Although he liked the building further back "for the proper dignity of such a building," he realized early-on how important cost conscientiousness would be to a successful outcome.

Kletting's site design uses a vehicular loop from the south side, which then edges along the perimeter of the platform. Pedestrian walks are from the southwest and southeast corners and along the sides of the vehicular paths. Unfortunately, Kletting's first drawing does not include the north part of the capitol grounds. It does show the eastern blocks as part of the grounds, and indicates Columbus Street will continue south until it intersects 200 (300) North. The front lawn is considerably fore-shortened (as indicated above, on instruction from the Capitol Commission) in comparison to Olmsted's plans. The building is almost on axis with Apricot Avenue. Kletting chose to leave the varied width of 200 (300) N. east of State Street and the angle of the East Capitol Street as they were.





RKKLETING SITE PLAN (2)

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Kletting's second site plan is more highly developed and includes the entire capitol grounds. Vehicular access is greatly enhanced. He formalized the head of State Street, and also used the northwest and southwest corners for vehicular entrances. The formal walks and drives of the front lawn have begun to respond to a very asymmetrical site situation, and the building is no longer on axis with Apricot Street, but is pushed a bit further north.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this plan is the treatment of the northern portion of the site. Anticipating the need for future growth, Kletting designed additional buildings around a plaza. This arrangement continues to provide requisite space surrounding the capitol building itself. It has long been recognized that "the most important way of giving good settings to monumental buildings is to relate them to a plaza."<sup>1</sup> Buildings around a plaza protect, define, and give character to a space, and each of those buildings have claim upon that space. The buildings here described are only ghosted in. They were indicated as a constraint and regulation for future growth and development of the site.

Kletting's site designs for the most part were not carried out. The grand walk up the front was retained and small service buildings at the rear of the site (the archives and greenhouse) were located similarly.

## As Built

Much more property than was indicated on any site plan was acquired to the east and to the west. This has resulted in entrances on the east and west that are considerably more distant and of an entirely different scale than was ever intended. This may actually be to our benefit now, as we deal with increasingly complex relationships between pedestrian and vehicles. The extra land provides additional options for altering the street sections that would otherwise be near-impossible. Among the traffic issues which must be considered are:

- \* Intertransit among adjacent facilities, like the White Chapel, Council Hall, and D.U.P.;
- \* Pedestrian activity at the perimeter of the site, whether in transit or recreation;
- \* Pedestrian use of the site-- whether it be tourist access to monuments and points of interest, employees on lunch break, traversing of the site from one office to another, or leaving a parked vehicle to access the site-- should be safe from vehicular traffic as well as any dark or hidden recesses;
- \* Cars should have no difficulty locating public parking, nor pedestrians locating walkways from the parking lots to main entrances;
- \* A light rail or shuttle service should be available to employees and tourists to the downtown area, to the nearest light rail station, as well as to locations of other state facilities. Both Olmsted and Kletting provided for light rail down Main Street from Columbus. If a system of public transportation functions well, there is the possibility that the capitol will need fewer and fewer parking spaces over the years, and have more room for using the grounds as they were intended.

After the capitol building was completed, Martin Christopherson, the Norwegian gardener, designed and completed most of the site's planting. It is not known how much of Kletting's plans were referenced by him at this time, but it does not appear from early photographs that there was much relationship between the architect's drawing and what was built or planted. It is almost certain that none of Olmsted's plans were referenced.

It appears in retrospect that the Capitol Commission felt it was more practical to spend its funds on the more architectural and permanent aspects of the project, upgrading building materials in many instances, and

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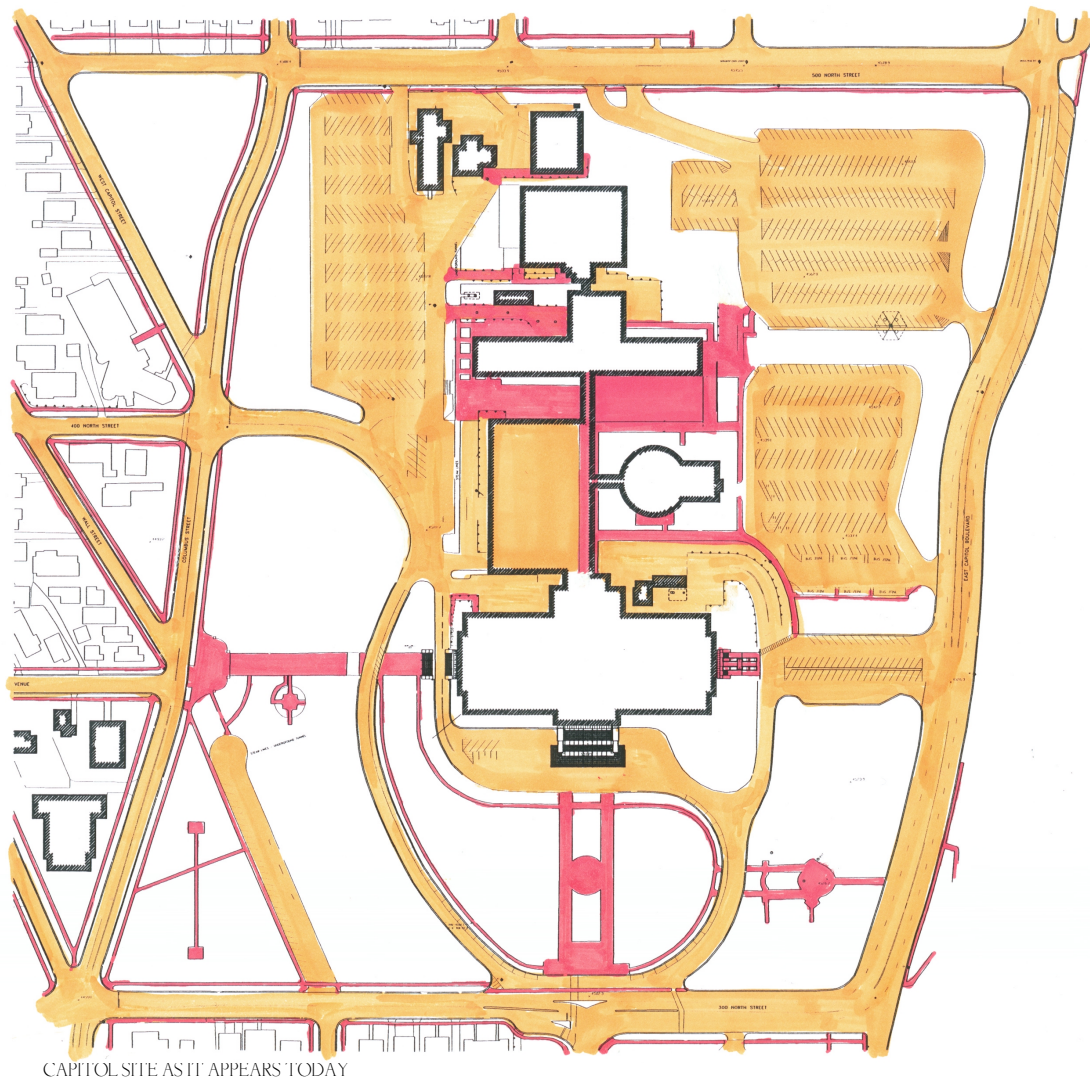
1. HEGEMANN, WERNER AND ELBERT PEETS. CIVIC ART. NEW YORK: PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS. 1988. 1922. P. 29.

delaying other expenses like paving, planting, exterior/interior monuments, sculpture and art. The rationale seemed to be that all of these could be easily added after the building was occupied.

## Recent Development

In the ensuing years, the Capitol grounds have changed dramatically with the addition of several newer buildings to the north, along with surface and sub-surface parking areas, plazas, walks, free-standing monuments, and the growth of mature landscaping. The original light fixtures are gone, as are some of the early paths. The 1999 tornado uprooted many of major trees in front of the building along 300 North. The old kidney-shaped reflecting pond north of the Capitol has been removed, as has been the water from the pool in front of the Mormon Battalion Monument. Recent improvements have not acknowledged the formal, symmetrical aspects of either Olmsted's or Kletting's earlier, classically-influenced plans. Changes seem to have been made on a piecemeal basis without using an overall master plan for guidance.

Although never associated with the Capitol historically, the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers complex, Council Hall and White Chapel were recently added to the Capitol campus in order to enhance the administration, maintenance and use of these adjacent, compatibly used facilities.



CAPITOL SITE AS IT APPEARS TODAY